

Of Medicine and Theater, Part Four (of Four

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Summary: Qui-Gon, Obi-Wan, and a trade dispute; Danae and Maa-Br'ee join in.

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General disclaimer: Danae and Jehru Maa-Br'ee are mine. A few others are available for hire. Obi-Wan Kenobi, Qui-Gon Jinn, and anything recognizable have been annexed by my imagination. All references to Bandomeer, Xanatos, metal boxes, and collars are taken from the second book of the Jedi Apprentice series.

Specific disclaimers: This story takes place after "First Impressions," which has a bit more explanation of who and what Danae and Maa-Br'ee are. There's four parts, all of which should be up in a day or two. Someday soon I'll also post an interlude that explains the endless allusions to Danae's problem with fortune tellers. After that, who knows what might befall my little apprentice?

> Of Medicine and Theater, Part Four . . . <p>

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Danae nodded in satisfaction as the doors slammed shut. No more. This has to end. She turned to the faces watching her. Slowly she pulled the torn shirt over her head, shook out her hair, and smiled at them.

"Hi," she said lightly. "My name is Danae, and I'm an Ambassador for the Republic." She flung the shirt aside, her arms flexing at the sudden freedom.

They stirred, looking at each other, then raised their

blasters.

"I'm a little lost, actually. I'm trying to get to--"

The shots erupted around her, and she leapt before she finished speaking, landing neatly on the nose of Qui-Gon's ship, her lightsaber igniting in her hand. Crouching, she smiled down at the horde of Canissans as they turned to face her new position, then brushed her lightsaber against her arm.

Blood rose up from the cut, spilling over her pale skin. Without taking her eyes off the figures below her, Danae raised her arm to her mouth and flicked her tongue over the warm fluid, barely tasting it. It was more than enough. She felt the tremor in her stomach, heard the familiar buzz in her ears as her system accelerated. The adrenaline rush made her lightheaded, but then they opened fire again, and she forgot all about it.

As she landed in their midst she drew the Force to herself, using it to map the beings around her, tracking their movements as they closed in. There's always a middle path, her mind offered up incoherently. Maa-Br'ee said there's always a middle path.

But she lost the train of thought as her lightsaber struck the first one. In a few moments, she had lost her conscious reasoning entirely. There was only the Canissans and droids, herself, and the Force. And, in the moment, the heat causing a fine sweat to rise on her body, the smell of blood and blaster fire searing her nostrils, the Force throbbing in her veins, she forgot to care.

\* \* \* \* \*

Maa-Br'ee nearly crashed into Qui-Gon, cutting through corridors towards the docking bay. "Where's Pl'xa?" His eyes narrowed as he saw the fresh splashes of blood on the Jedi's robes. "And what happened to you?"

Qui-Gon shook his head. "I lost Pl'xa, but I met a few soldiers on the way here. What about Maku?"

"Dead." Maa-Br'ee scowled. "The Canissans seem to have a thing for hands."

"Obi-Wan's here."

"As is Danae. They probably went to the ship."

Qui-Gon nodded. "We have to find them. And then figure a way out of here."

The two Jedi began running down the corridor, Maa-Br'ee eyeing Qui-Gon suspiciously. "What do you mean, 'figure a way out of here?'"

"The entire building is sealed. If we can't find a service tunnel, we'll have to cut our way out."

"Or we could use the ship."

"If it's in any condition to fly." Qui-Gon shook his head. "I doubt

Pl'xa would leave us that option."

They rounded a corner, stopping as they sensed a flurry of motion at the far end of the hall. Both raised their lightsabers and readied themselves.

Obi-Wan's small figure burst into view, sprinting towards them. He skidded to a halt and looked at the two Masters in astonishment. "Are you going to strike me down, now?"

Maa-Br'ee groaned, his hands falling limply at his sides. "I'm getting far too old for this."

Qui-Gon grabbed Obi-Wan by the arm. "Where have you been? How did you get these bruises? What in the galaxy have you been up to?"

"We found the operation, Danae shoved me off a hangar platform, and now we're back," Obi-Wan replied quickly. "But that doesn't matter--"

"That's all you have to say?" Qui-Gon interrupted, turning his student around. "Are you hurt? How badly are you injured?"

"I'm fine," Obi-Wan hissed, his face darkening. "We have to get to the docking bay."

"Danae's there, correct?" Maa-Br'ee's voice was calm.

"Yes. There was a freighter, it was full of Canissans and battle droids--"

"How many?"

"I don't know. Dozens, maybe more."

Maa-Br'ee nodded and began running towards the docking bay, Qui Gon and Obi-Wan following. "How long has she been there for?" he called over his shoulder.

"Only a few minutes."

"She'll be alright, then." He ran until he reached the doors, frowning at the controls. They could hear blaster fire from the other side. "But we need to get her out of there, before she lets go."

"What do you mean, 'lets go?'" Obi-Wan asked uneasily.

"She's half-Provissian, Obi-Wan," Maa-Br'ee replied. He began cutting through the doors with his lightsaber, Qui-Gon doing the same next to him.

The use of his first name startled Obi-Wan. "So?"

"Provissians are hunters by nature," he responded softly. "They get bloodlust. Something Danae has learned to control, but has difficulty resisting at times."

Qui-Gon shot him a look. "Bloodlust?"

Maa-Br'ee shrugged. "She hasn't succumbed in years. But she knows how to bring it on. And when she's cornered . . ." he left the phrase hanging.

"Wonderful," the younger Master said caustically.

They worked silently for a few moments, pausing only as an explosion echoed from behind the doors. Maa-Br'ee redoubled his efforts, and Qui-Gon did the same.

Finally they stopped, slowly withdrawing their lightsabers. Obi-Wan walked up and kicked the red-rimmed circle as hard as he could. Carefully, the three Jedi stepped through the opening.

\* \* \* \* \*

In Danae, the Force sung.

Once, when she was younger, she had met a bounty hunter in a tavern on Teth. He told a story about raping a Provissian woman on Coruscant, a story that amused him, and then he had reached for her. The Force had sung to Danae then, but it had sung to her of pain, and death, and the joy of revenge. And Maa-Br'ee had taken her far away, and made her live with him in isolation for a year, until she heard it no more.

In Danae, the Force sung. It sang to her of Bavu, of Vani, of the countless beings who had died in the facility. It sang to her of the misery of deceit, of the horror when one being turns upon another and sees only profit and hate. It sang to her of balance, of ease.

She could feel blood running on her face, feel it trickling down her leg. She could hear the scream of pain from her seared arm, but that was a part of the song, now. She could see the bodies that she left in her wake as she led the small army in a dance around the docking bay, leaping neatly from ship to fueling tower to floor again. She could see more, only wounded, picking themselves up and dragging themselves out of her reach.

\_And more than half ain't too bad.\_

Every blow she aimed connected. Every leap set her spinning higher, almost making herself dizzy. She loved the dizziness, the feel of the air, the surprise as she would suddenly duck a shot, or slide past an outstretched fist.

And as the song began to lessen, as the steady racing of her hearts began to slow, she heard the hiss of lightsabers cutting through metal. The sound brought a smile to her lips. \_Perfect timing. \_She drew the remaining Canissans and droids to the back of the docking bay and readied herself.

\_Once more, then. \_

She ran a bloody finger over her lips, and threw herself at the nearest Canissan.

\* \* \* \* \*

The three Jedi stood on the ramp for a moment, gazing at the docking

bay. Droids lay in scattered heaps of metal, intertwined with Canissans. Some of the masked beings were moving fitfully, others obviously dead. A few stood and offered a half-hearted spray of blaster fire towards the newcomers, which was quickly deflected.

Obi-Wan shook his head in amazement. \_She did all this?\_ He hesitated, then followed the two older Jedi as they fanned out towards the back of the bay. In the shadow of the freighter he could see a violet lightsaber moving surely through the last pack of Canissans, sense the Force gathered around her like a shroud.

As they neared the freighter, a Canissan stumbled into the light, clutching at his side. His goggles met Obi-Wan's eyes for a moment, and then he toppled over.

It was more than Obi-Wan could bear. He ran forward, ignoring Qui Gon's warning shout, pushing his way through the debris and wounded Canissans. Finally he saw a slender, pale form, resting atop a storage container.

As he approached, he slowed his pace. "Danae?" he said cautiously.

She raised her head, looking down at him from her perch. She was drenched in sweat and shaking slightly, her hands rubbing at her temples. Her undershirt was spattered with blood, though he couldn't determine whether it was her own or the Canissans. Footsteps echoed on the ramp, and her head shot up completely. "Don't they ever stop?" she muttered.

The familiar voice made him relax. He opened his mouth to speak again, but she suddenly leapt down. His eyes widened as her lightsaber flew into her hand.

Obi-Wan felt frozen. It seemed as if time had slowed inexorably. Danae stood before him, but it wasn't her, wasn't the girl who had smiled at him, who had kissed him in the underground facility. Her eyes had gone vacant, devoid of emotion. He could hear blaster fire echoing behind him, hear Qui-Gon and Maa-Br'ee's lightsabers humming as they fended off the new attack. And she raised her fist, the lightsaber gripped tightly in it.

He stayed perfectly still as her arm pulled back, then shot forward. His eyes flickered close, waiting instinctively for the pain. \_No matter what she's feeling, I can't fight her. I could never--\_

The arm whizzed past him; he could feel the faint rush of air next to his ear. Behind him, he heard her fist connect with something solid. He whirled and gaped at the bloody Canissan who lay behind him, a bruise spreading over his face. \_I didn't even sense him!\_

She sagged against the storage unit, shaking her head. He took a step closer, trying to sense her. "Danae?"

Her eyes met his again. Her eyes this time. Focused, warm. "I'm here, Obi-Wan," she said gently. "Just . . . a little tired . . . " Breathing heavily, she slid to the floor, her head bowing over her knees.

He sat down next to her. His hands caught at her face, and he grimaced at the large cut on her forehead. Without speaking, he tore a swath of fabric from the sleeve of his tunic and began dabbing at her forehead.

She curled over her knees again, dodging his hands. Her whole body began to spasm. "Just . . . give me a moment . . . "

"Are you okay?" he whispered. On her back, he could see two large weals, and another running down her leg.

She nodded mutely. Sensing a presence behind them, he turned quickly, his hand reaching for his lightsaber. But it was only Maa-Br'ee, who smiled at him in reassurance before turning to his apprentice.

"Danae?"

The voice, riddled with concern, made her head raise slightly. "I'm clear."

"I know, Danae. I know." Her Master bent over, brushing at her face. "Obi-Wan, go help your Master. He's detaining Governor Pl'xa. And we need medical assistance."

"But--" Obi-Wan looked at Danae.

"Go on, young man." Maa-Br'ee's tone brooked no argument.

He took one last glance at her. \_I want to stay, she needs me--\_ but Danae's eyes met his, and she angled her head in the direction of the ramp. Frowning, he turned and began running back to Qui-Gon.

Maa-Br'ee waited until Obi-Wan was out of earshot. "You brought it on?"

"Yes. But I checked it." She took a deep breath, quieting the tremors that wracked her body. "It was so strong, Maa-Br'ee."

"I know it was." He sat down beside her, then shook his head. "I'm not sure what to say."

"I didn't--" she paused, searching for the right words. "I didn't think I could do this, without it. I forget my fear. I forget that I want to live."

"So perhaps we should work on that, then?" Maa-Br'ee rubbed her head. "It worked here, Danae. But you cannot avoid your fears forever. Especially not at this price."

She shrugged. "I just figured this wasn't the time for a lesson."

"You're right. It wasn't. And you kept it in check, which was your greatest problem."

"One less distraction?"

He smiled at her. "If you can control it, Danae, then you can

overcome it. What we need to do now is keep it from becoming a crutch."

"Maa-Br'ee?"

"Yes?"

"Bavu's dead." She bit her lip. "I saw him, in the forest--"

"I know." His tone was bitter. "I saw part of him."

"They didn't have to." Tears began spilling over her cheeks. "They didn't have to kill him."

"No, they didn't. But I don't think they cared very much, one way or another." He wiped her tears gently. "Don't focus on the past, my apprentice. Just rest. I need to help Qui-Gon, and we must figure out what to do now. We'll speak again later, I promise."

She watched as he rose and began striding back towards the ramp.  
\_Can't focus on the past. Must let go.\_

Bavu's face, stern, then teasing, swam before her eyes. Helping her bandage a scraped knee, listening to her recounted dreams over early morning meals. Bringing them food and supplies on Teth, no payment necessary, his almost gruff response to their gratitude. Winking at her when Maa-Br'ee had agreed to renew her training, helping her scour the markets for the perfect crystals when she rebuilt her lightsaber. Telling her stories of the Rim settlements when Maa-Br'ee was occupied, quick to offer her distraction and a shoulder on the bad days, always happy to celebrate the good ones--

Letting go was proving harder than she could ever have imagined.

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Qui-Gon stared down at the crying form of the Governor, bent over her manacled wrists. With a sigh, he turned to Obi-Wan. "There was a storage room at the end of the corridor," he said quietly. "See if there are any medical supplies. In either case, come straight back here." He raised his hand as Obi-Wan nodded. "And do not engage any more soldiers, if you see any. Just go, and come back."

"Yes, Master." Obi-Wan's eyes flickered once more to the rear of the hangar, then he began walking towards the open hole in the hangar doors, his shoulders squared.

"Obi-Wan." Qui-Gon smiled as his apprentice turned. "You did well."

"Thank you, Master."

Maa-Br'ee came up next to Qui-Gon, touching him on the arm. "He's older."

"This would age anyone." Qui-Gon turned to meet Maa-Br'ee's steady gaze. "I cannot believe Danae did all this."

"She's very strong in the living Force. She listens to it, and her

heart. And she is willing to risk herself at all times. Which is why she was able to send your Padawan to us, and stay and fight."

"I know what she did," Qui-Gon replied calmly. "He never would have made it through something like this."

"She's learning, at least. She once went through a tavern on Teth without leaving a single being alive. I nearly lost her, then." Maa-Br'ee's face darkened. "I managed to bring her back, but it haunts her. She's learned to control it, but she's also getting better at lying to me about how it affects her. And losing Bavu isn't helping very much."

Qui-Gon nodded slowly. "What happened in the tavern?"

"She was very young, about twelve or so. We had just come from the Temple, and Yoda had told her about her mother while we were there. I made the rash decision of letting her build her own lightsaber, and she went to fetch us some dinner to celebrate its completion. In the tavern, she overheard a bounty hunter telling a rather tasteless story about raping a Provissian woman on Coruscant." Maa-Br'ee glanced back at Danae sitting against the storage unit, her head bowed. "I think the punchline had something to do with hot water. And then the bounty hunter saw her, and thought it might be fun to give a demonstration. From what I could gather, everyone was very enthusiastic about it. She never gave them a chance to try."

"I see." Qui-Gon followed Maa-Br'ee's gaze. He stared for a moment at the slumped figure. "Check the rest of the building," he said softly. "And try to find some sort of medical personnel, for the Canissans as well as her."

Maa-Br'ee nodded. "What are you--"

"I want to speak to her. Obi-Wan's in the corridor, he can help you." Qui-Gon began picking his way through the groaning bodies, moving blasters well out of reach as he did so. He could see her shoulders shaking, and felt a wave of sympathy rush over him.

"Danae."

She raised her head and looked at him. Her eyes were full.

Qui-Gon stretched out his hands to her. She hesitated, then slid her own into them, letting the Master help her off the ground. As her legs straightened, she wavered.

"Easy," the older man said gruffly. He slid an arm under hers and began leading her away from the bodies, until they reached a corner filled with supply containers and repair equipment. She dropped onto a box with a sigh, and he knelt in front of her.

"How do you feel?"

"Drained, but calm. Sad." She smiled wryly at him. "I'm a bit of a mess."

He turned her gently, examining the wounds on her back. "You killed very few, everything considered."



"I tried," she murmured, wincing as he pressed a particularly sore spot. "I really did. But they wouldn't stop, they never even spoke--"

"I know." He touched her face briefly, wiping at the dried blood on her cheek. "A long time ago, Danae, you came to me and told me that in refusing Obi-Wan as my Padawan the only person I was helping was myself."

She nodded slowly.

"You were right. And, through him, I came to recognize the boundaries of my own guilt. We are all, in the end, simply players in fate. We have little choice but to negotiate the situation we find ourselves in. And it does no good to berate ourselves afterwards."

Her face fell.

"What?"

"I hate it when I get quoted to myself."

He smiled. "They were good words. Well-spoken, if a bit headstrong."

"It's different to be on the receiving end." She paused. "Qui-Gon?"

"Yes?"

"When I fight . . . " she looked around the room sadly. "It's like a great song, a beautiful song that I move in time with. The Force sings to me. I heard that song differently once." Her eyes centered on him. "But it's not that different. It's the most minute of variations. A slightly different tone, a quicker move . . . it's so close." Her voice had dropped to a whisper.

Qui-Gon hesitated, then leaned forward. "I once had a conversation with Yoda, long ago, when I was not much older than you. I had heard a rumor of a Jedi who had turned, a being I greatly respected. I felt angry and betrayed. This Jedi, who I had tried to emulate, had simply changed one day. I didn't understand it."

Danae's eyes held his, searching.

"Yoda said something very similar to what you just told me. He said the two sides are forever intertwined. Light and dark are simply a step away from each other. I asked him then, how to fight it? How to stay away from it?"

She swallowed. "What did he say?"

"He said that it was not a question of fighting, or staying away. He said that a true Jedi knows the dark as intimately as the light, and picks their path accordingly. And he said that if a Jedi can do that--if they can recognize both sides and still choose, day after day--then there comes a time when they will hear both songs as one."

Tears spilled over her cheeks. He wiped them away gently. "You are a

great Jedi, Danae. And you will be a greater one still. You were right again when you said that we are alike: Maa-Br'ee, I, Obi-Wan, and you. For thousands of years the Jedi did nothing but meditate and study. And there is security in that, but there is also isolation. To engage with the galaxy provides challenges and fears, and it brings new ones every day. What we have in common is a dedication to our own compassion, and a focus on that as a guide. It does not always follow the Code, or the laws of the Republic. But it lets us choose our path. And it is right."

He jerked, startled, as she hugged him tightly. "Thank you," she whispered.

"No, Danae." He returned the gesture slowly, careful not to press on her wounds. "Thank you. You saved Obi-Wan's life twice now."

She recoiled. "How did you know that?" she asked suspiciously.

"I'm not a Master for nothing," he replied lightly, his eyes twinkling.

She laughed then, trailing off into a hacking cough. He rose and stretched out his hand to her. "Come, little Padawan. Let's get you to a medic."

> <br> \* \* \* \* \*

Obi-Wan sat on the edge of the ramp leading to the docking bay, watching as the Human physicians hastily rounded up by Maa-Br'ee tended to the last of the Canissans. They were being carried out on stretchers, one by one, and carted to makeshift examining rooms set up in the conference rooms and offices of the capitol building.

He was exhausted, moreso than he could ever remember being, but he was careful not to show it to Qui-Gon or Maa-Br'ee. They had needed him throughout the night and well into dawn. After getting Danae out of the docking bay, he had brought Maa-Br'ee to see Vani, who in turn had led them to a Human named Albran. Maa-Br'ee had immediately dubbed him acting Governor, and they had set about trying to restore order.

It was far more work than he could have imagined. Besides the Canissans in the capitol building, there were those still residing in the city whose guilt or innocence was yet to be determined, and a party had been sent to the forest to start shutting down the facility he and Danae had found. Pl'xa was imprisoned, and Pune's body had been found, waiting to be transported much as Bavu's had.

As the Jedi began to understand the scope of the operation, finding notes of Pl'xa's dating back to well before the droughts, they had finally contacted the Republic. Qui-Gon was still speaking with the Chancellor, but Obi-Wan was fairly sure the Republic would step in to take over Canissa's government until new elections could be held. Albran had sent Ware D'bussi, Vani's second cousin, to try and track down the Sdunas, who had gone into hiding in the forest. But it would be another day before any Republic contingent could arrive, and until then the Jedi were left to try and help Albran keep order on the planet.

\_All well and good, but I could really use a nap.\_

He jumped as a hand rested on his shoulder, and looked up to see Qui-Gon smiling at him. "Almost done here?"

Obi-Wan nodded.

"Maa-Br'ee just contacted me. He found the facility, and they're sweeping it now. He says to tell you that he apologizes for Danae shoving you off the platform. It's apparently quite a drop."

"She already apologized."

"I'm sure she has." Qui-Gon shook his head. "You should never have gone there in the first place--"

"We had to know," Obi-Wan interrupted.

"But there were four of us. It was unnecessary to take such a risk."

His apprentice's shoulders slumped. "We thought we were doing the right thing."

"I'm not saying you committed an error, Obi-Wan. You did very well out there. Just, next time, please inform me first."

Obi-Wan was about to argue, then saw the smile playing around his Master's lips. "Yes, Master."

"Perhaps you should get some rest, then?"

"What about the Republic? What did the Chancellor say?"

"A party of officers will arrive tomorrow." Qui-Gon sighed. "And none too soon. The Humans are outraged, as well they should be. Maa Br'ee is returning as soon as he finishes the sweep, and I think it's best if you stay here tonight."

"What do you mean?"

"Tempers are running high, my apprentice. Albran has set up a committee to try and police the city tonight, but I doubt it will be very effective."

Obi-Wan felt cold inside. "Oh."

Qui-Gon squeezed his shoulder. "We are doing what we can, Obi-Wan. But we cannot make decisions for all. It is up to the people of Canissa now, to try and overcome what has happened."

"I--I guess." He shook his head, then looked up at his Master. "How is Danae?"

Qui-Gon snorted. "Asleep, finally. The doctor and I had to sedate her. She kept insisting that she could help, despite all evidence to the contrary."

\_A scene I can imagine all too well.\_ "What can I do to help?"

"You can rest."

"But what about the Sdunas? And what if there are more Canissans?"

"Do I have to sedate you as well?" Qui-Gon folded his arms.

Obi-Wan sighed. "No, Master."

"Come on. I'll walk you to our rooms."

They walked slowly through the halls, Qui-Gon pausing to receive updates from the Humans hurrying past them. Finally they turned into the quieter corridor of the guest quarters.

"What do you think of Danae?"

The question startled Obi-Wan. "I like her," he admitted. "Though I don't understand her very well."

"I thought as much. I was rather surprised you went with her at all."

"She made it seem like a reasonable action."

Qui-Gon chuckled. "Did Jehru tell you how he came to choose her?"

Obi-Wan shook his head.

"You know, though, that he chose her as an infant?"

"No, Master." Obi-Wan looked at him curiously. "I didn't think that happened at all."

"Only rarely. Jehru had just returned from Ryloth, and was due to report to the Council on his mission. He had been a Jedi for, oh, I'd say ten years?" Qui-Gon's brow furrowed. "Yes, that's about right. He had taken his trials not long before I did."

"You said you had known him for some time."

"Ever since we were initiates."

"And he's been on the Outer Rim?"

"For the most part, yes. The Council quickly learned that he openly disliked missions in the Core, and assigned him accordingly." Qui-Gon shrugged. "He's never been one for keeping his opinion to himself."

"Much like you," Obi-Wan muttered.

"A very adept observation, Padawan. So he returned, but the Council hadn't yet assembled, so he decided to seek out Yoda first. After much searching, he finally found Yoda in the Healers' wing. They had just brought Danae and her mother to the Temple."

"Her mother?"

His Master nodded. "Yoda had sensed Danae on Coruscant, and found her with her mother, who was gravely ill. The Healers tried to save her,

but it was too late. When Jehru entered the room, Danae's mother had already passed, and Danae was lying in a crib. At first Jehru thought nothing of it, but according to him, she kept looking at him." A warm smile broke over his face. "He said that she looked at him like she wanted to tell him a secret. He kept trying to speak with Yoda, but she kept staring at him. Finally he picked her up, utterly convinced she would tell him something. Instead, she pinched his nose as hard as she could, and then laughed at him. He was decided from that moment on."

Obi-Wan smiled. "It sounds like her."

"She's a good Jedi, Obi-Wan. A little more headstrong than some would like, and her training has been different as well. But she will be quite extraordinary when her time comes."

"Why are you telling me this?"

Qui-Gon sighed. "Because of what Jehru said. It is not as terrible as it might seem, my apprentice. Every Jedi has their weakness, their problems they must work to overcome. Danae's genetic heritage is hers, just as pride was Xanatos'."

"And what is mine?" Obi-Wan asked uneasily.

"That, Obi-Wan, you must discover for yourself." Qui-Gon halted in front of their rooms, putting a finger to his lips. "Try not to make too much noise," he said softly. "We put her in Jehru's room, next to ours."

"Oh." He hesitated, shifting from one foot to another.  
"Master?"

"Yes?"

"What was your weakness?"

Qui-Gon winked. "That, I think, is a story best left for another time."

"But--"

"Rest, Obi-Wan."

His shoulders slumped. "Yes, Master. But what if something happens?"

"Trust me."

"But--"

Qui-Gon snorted. "You'll know if something happens. Because if you did not wake up, and I'm sure you would, that one--" he jerked a thumb towards Maa-Br'ee's room-- "will be sure to inform you."

"Oh. Right." He looked at the closed door. "I--I guess."

"I know." Qui-Gon opened their door. "So get some rest. I don't want to see you again before dinner at the earliest."

"Dinner?" Obi-Wan shook his head. "That's a whole day!"

"You have more than that to make up for. Go on." Qui-Gon's eyes narrowed as Obi-Wan dawdled in the hallway. "Go."

"But--"

Qui-Gon's arms folded again. With a loud sigh, Obi-Wan slipped into the room, wincing as the door slammed shut behind him.

> <br> Epilogue

Obi-Wan Kenobi shifted uneasily in his sleep.

His dreams were dark, as they sometimes could be, filled with images both known and unknown, until he was unsure what was real and what was only his imagination. Some of the figures he knew: Xanatos, the Hutt, friends from the Temple and his missions with Qui-Gon. Others were strangers, dark faces, sometimes with a hint of red or metal, always menacing. Sometimes he managed to fight them off. Other times, he died, and watched others die as well. He had dreamed his own death many times, and in a hundred different ways.

Tonight, however, some of the dream-images were unfamiliar. He knew the desert he paced in, knew the sense of isolation, of waiting, that would make him grind his teeth with frustration. He knew too the sense of something catastrophic occurring, the feel of death in the Force, weighing it down. What was different tonight was the battle he was watching.

Two figures were fighting in the desert. One was robed, like a Jedi, but using weapons he had never seen a Jedi wield before. The other was an older woman, her red ponytail whipping around her face as she attacked the Jedi. He realized that neither cared whether they lived or died; both were completely caught up in destroying each other.

Shifting his gaze, he looked over the great expanse of sand. Another figure was watching, his face obviously amused by the unfolding events of the battle.

\_Xanatos.\_

He felt the scars on his back ache in recognition. And then Xanatos was in front of him, reaching for him, his face becoming masked in black metal, and he knew what would happen next, how the dream would spiral downward into darkness, until there was nothing but pain . . .

As Xanatos' hand brushed his neck, as he began feeling frenetically for the lightsaber he knew wouldn't be there, the fighting Jedi paused. A pale hand knocked the hood of its robe back, revealing a woman's face framed with long waves of purple-black hair.

Danae's eyes met his, older, almost serene. He felt the hand around his throat, saw the blaster rise to press against Danae's temples. And as the shot echoed in the desert, everything went black.

Obi-Wan snapped awake on his sleeping couch, his body soaked in

sweat. It took him a minute to get his bearings. \_Canissa. I'm on Canissa. Qui-Gon told me to rest, I've been asleep for most of the day. \_

He rose quickly and went to the sink, splashing cold water over his face and neck. A glance at the window told him that night had fallen while he slept, and it was probably well past dinnertime.

\_Should I go find Qui-Gon? Try to help?\_ He moved to the window, looking out at the nighttime landscape. Manis' lights gleamed, but on the Human side only. The Canissan side was engulfed in darkness. He sensed movement in the streets, and squinted, trying to make out shapes in the darkness. And then he saw it. The faintest gleam of torchlight, moving through the Canissan streets. Frowning, he counted to himself. \_Ten. No, twelve. \_They spread apart, then grouped together. And then one arced into the air, landing in a shower of sparks on a rooftop.

The house became tinged with red, then began burning steadily. The flames rose up, casting a glow over the neighboring area. He could see figures running out the doors, gathering themselves in huddled groups outside. More torches were heading towards nearby dwellings, moving inside, throwing objects out into the street. Ornate embellishments were stripped away, bags were rapidly filled. At the far end of the street, another house burst into flame.

He ran for the door. As he entered the corridor, he calmed his mind, trying to sense the other Jedi. He could feel nothing of Qui-Gon and Maa Br'ee. \_Probably out in the city, then. But I wouldn't know where to look.\_

His senses, however, detected one other presence. Quickly he rapped on the door next to his own.

"Who is it?" The voice that wafted out was wary, alert.

"It's me." He realized at once how absurd it sounded. "It's Obi Wan," he amended.

Danae audibly snickered. "Well, Obi-Wan can come in, then."

A smile appeared automatically on his face as he opened the door. His eyes lit upon the empty sleeping couch, blankets tossed aside, and he felt a moment's concern. But a breeze cut through the room, and as he turned towards the source of the air he saw her.

She had knocked the window open and was perched on the sill, her knees pressed against her chest, looking out over Manis. He stared at her, unsure of what to do. She was dressed in a simple white sheath that just covered her knees, the color making her seem even more pale than normal. Bandages were swathed over her forearm and calf, and another was affixed to her forehead, pushing back the short locks of hair that seemed black in the dim light of the room.

"You shouldn't be out of bed," he said quietly.

"Have you come to reprimand me?" \_That could be interesting. \_She turned and smiled at him, the faint residue from her face paint drawing shadows across her features.

Obi-Wan shook his head, walking slowly across the room to stand next to her. "I'd be a hypocrite if I did."

"So you're supposed to be in bed too?"

"I've been asleep for most of the day."

Her nose wrinkled. "As have I, courtesy of your Master. He moves awfully fast. Got me in the neck before I could start to argue."

"It sounds like him," Obi-Wan said absently. He was gazing at the city, the two fires still raging, their flames leaping dangerously close to the surrounding trees and dwellings. "Have you been watching?"

She nodded. "They just torched the houses, but they've been moving for almost an hour now."

He slid onto the sill next to her, leaning his back against the window frame, one leg dangling over the edge. He nearly tensed as she leaned against him, her back pressing against his chest, but instead slid an arm around her waist.

"What should we do?"

"I don't know what we can do," she replied. "The Humans are angry, Obi-Wan, and with good reason."

"But this isn't right."

"Neither were the Canissans." She laid a hand over the one pressing against her stomach. \_Oh, this feels so good. And I couldn't even begin to explain how, or why.\_ "Maa-Br'ee's out there, and I think Qui-Gon joined him. They'll do what they can."

"So we have to just sit here and watch?" He felt frustrated. "I thought you didn't turn away."

She stiffened against him. "I don't."

"Yet you'll just watch while they hurt each other?"

"I help those who cannot help themselves, Obi-Wan. I don't mete out justice, or try and be an arbiter for an entire planet."

"And you're drawing that line now?"

"What would you do?" Her head angled back until her eyes met his. "This won't end tonight, or even when the Republic freighter arrives. It will take years for this to heal, if it ever does. The Republic will be as unable to stop it as we are, and they're probably unwilling to even try."

"That doesn't make sense. Why else would they come here?"

"Think about it. Do you honestly think the Republic cares about the animosity here? For them, this is simply another planet to tax. Oh, they'll impose a martial law, help the government to reestablish itself. If the situation becomes too violent they'll probably request another Jedi to mediate yet another negotiation. But this--" she



gestured to the expanse of the city, now lit by three burning houses-- "this has to be healed internally. No imposed will can stop this, even if an attempt was made."

Obi-Wan pulled her closer, pressing his head into the crook of her neck. "I don't like it," he murmured. "It's not right."

"No, it's not right." Her hand reached up to tug on his braid. "We've done a lot, Obi-Wan. We've stopped a horrible situation, one that was affecting not just this planet, but the entire galaxy. But there are limits to what anyone can do. At some point, the people of Canissa must figure out what to do for themselves. And that we cannot affect."

"I was going to cut that off."

"I like it." She kissed his cheek. "It makes you look different."

"It makes me look weird."

"No, it makes you look different. There's nothing wrong with being different. It's bad enough we have to endure these haircuts."

"Master Yoda wishes it so."

"Master Yoda also likes it when initiates carry him on their backs. It doesn't mean it's necessary for every student in the Temple to give him piggyback rides."

He snorted in her neck, making her giggle. "Master Qui-Gon says the same thing."

"It's true." She glanced once more at the city. "Let's move. I'm getting a little queasy watching this."

He sighed with relief as they rose, shutting the window and pulling thick drapes over the opening. But his relief faded as she turned to him, her narrow body gleaming in the white sheath.

"So what do you want to do?" Her eyebrow arched.

"I--" he hesitated, suddenly feeling very uneasy. "I want to do a hundred things. But I wouldn't even know how to ask. \_"Maybe we can just talk?"

"Sure." She flopped down on the sleeping couch, and he sat down beside her. "What do you want to talk about?"

"I had a dream," he began slowly. "Just before now."

"Is that what woke you up?"

He nodded, his shoulders hunching over. "I have a lot of weird dreams. They're not usually very good."

Danae sat up, looking at him closely. "Precognition? \_"What about?"

"Oh, I don't know. Dark things." He shrugged unhappily. "Master Qui Gon says they're normal, that it's just apprehension working itself out."

"But this one was different somehow?"

"You were in it." His eyes met hers. "You were fighting someone. In a desert."

She licked her lips nervously. "Who?"

"A woman. I don't know who. She had long, red hair. You wanted to kill her. But in a strange way."

\_Aurra. And there's no way he could know about it. \_"How so?"

"I don't know. It didn't feel like before, in the docking bay--"

Danae hesitated. "Did it feel like I was hungry, somehow? That it wasn't quite me?"

He looked at his hands. "Is that what it feels like?" he whispered.

"Yes." She saw the apprehension in his face and wiggled closer to him. "It's a physical reaction, Obi-Wan. Like having a rush of energy, or feeling angry and wanting to hit something."

"How does it happen?" His tone was still miserable.

"In me, it's the taste of blood. The smell makes me feel it a little, or encourages it if it's already happening. But taste is the key."

"So if you don't taste it, you don't feel it."

"Right." She took his hand in her own, turning it over in her lap. "And I'm learning to control it. I know what it feels like, and I can take steps to prevent it, calm myself in time."

"Or you can bring it on."

She sighed. "Or I can bring it on, yes."

"When did you first feel it?"

"When I was twelve."

He scowled. "And you're going to tell me I should ask at another time."

"I already told you to ask at another time."

"Teth or fortune tellers, then?"

"Teth," she replied simply.

"Any idea when I can ask?"

"Does it mean that much to you?"

He looked at her. "It means everything," he said quietly.

"Why?" Her eyebrow arched.

"Because--" he hesitated, searching for words. "Because I dreamed of you. And because this all feels important. And because . . . "

Her arms encircled his neck. He sighed as he hugged her in return. "Because I care," he finished, his voice almost inaudible.

She held him for a long moment. \_Greater than us both. It always is, somehow. And he dreamed of Aurra and I . . . so hard to imagine his being a part of that, if it ever occurs.\_

"I don't want you to be afraid of me," she whispered, her voice choking.

"I could never be afraid of you."

"You have to trust me. If you don't . . . "

"I do," he said softly, rubbing her back. "I trust you with my life, Danae." He kissed her cheek. "Even if I protest your methods from time to time."

She burst out laughing. He grinned as she pulled away, her face diffused with pink. "So tell me?" he whispered, his tone openly pleading.

"Hmph." She stopped laughing. "Well, get comfortable, Padawan. This is going to be quite a tale."

"Which one am I getting?"

Danae smiled sadly at him. "You want it all?"

In response he obediently slid himself against the wall, propping a cushion behind his back. She sighed and laid down next to him, resting her head in his lap. His hand dropped to her forehead, and he began gently playing with her hair.

"When I was nine years old, I met Aurra Sing . . . "

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The first gleam of sun appeared on Canissa's horizon, smearing the edge of the horizon with purple. In Manis, the fires were dying out, the streets littered with ash and the remnants of a night's worth of looting. Bleary-eyed Humans began moving wearily back to their own section, while frightened Canissans slipped into the houses of friends and neighbors, peering out from behind shuttered windows.

In the Human section, Jehru Maa-Br'ee and Qui-Gon Jinn rested in Albran's house, reviewing plans for the impending arrival of the Republic. The first draft of a new Canissan constitution gleamed from a datapad, and Ware D'bussi's reports were being replayed endlessly. Their only interruption was a somber Vani, bringing food, drink, and blankets to ward off the early morning chill.

The capitol building was all but silent. Sleeping Canissans tossed fitfully in their makeshift beds, watched by wary doctors and nurses. A hastily assembled Human guard strode the boulevard as their Canissan counterparts had done only two days before. The lobby was still filled with broken glass, and in the docking bay the hulk of an empty freighter cast a faint shadow over a smaller long-range spacecraft next to it. A single astromech droid moved studiously around the smaller ship, reaffixing a panel over the even lines of new wiring.

In the guest quarters, the rooms were engulfed in darkness, windows tightly shuttered against the impending sunrise. The room occupied by Qui-Gon and his Padawan learner, Obi-Wan Kenobi, was empty. Next door, in the room given to Maa-Br'ee, the faintest rustling noise echoed in the darkness, followed by a hesitant whisper.

"Danae?"

The response was more sigh than speech, filled with more caring than the whisperer had ever dreamed of.

"Yes\_ . . .\_"

Neither noticed when the sun finally rose.  
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file.